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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 R

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DRAFTED BY NEA/AEGRIFIN:MAR

APPROVED BY NEA/AEGRIFIN

S/S:MR SHANKLE

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T STATE 212206

EXDIS DISTRIBUTE AS NODIS

FOLLOWING REPEATS NICOSIA 2518 ACTION SECSTATE 26 AUG 76

QUOTE S E C R E T NICOSIA 2518

NODIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM HOUGHTON AND MACK

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR LE

SUBJECT: THE POSITION OF THE CHRISTIANS VIS-A-VIS A SETTLE-
MENT OF THE LEBANESE CONFLICT

REF: NICOSIA 2491

1. THE FOLLOWING DEFINITION OF THE POSITION OF THE
CHRISTIANS VIS-A-VIS A SETTLEMENT OF THE CURRENT CONFLICT
IS BASED ON OUR CONVERSATIONS WITH ALL THE MAJOR CHRISTIAN
LEADERS AND SOME OF SECONDARY ONES. ALTHOUGH WE SOUGHT AS
MUCH PRECISION AS POSSIBLE DURING OUR STAY IN JOUNIEH, THE
LEADERS WERE VAGUE ON SOME POINTS.

2. THE CHRISTIANS SEE THE PROBLEM OF A SETTLEMENT IN TWO

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PARTS, WITH A LEBANESE-PALESTINIAN SETTLEMENT TO PRECEDE

RECONCILIATION WITH THE MOSLEM LEBANESE SIDE OF THE CONFLICT. AS FAR AS WE COULD DETERMINE THE MARONITES VIEW A CHRISTIAN-MOSLEM SETTLEMENT AS PRIMARILY A POLITICAL EXERCISE. ONLY SARKIS AND DORY CHAMOUN ALLUDED TO THE NECESSITY OF SOCIAL AND OTHER REFORMS. FRANGIE AND CHAMOUN TOOK THE INITIATIVE AND WENT TO ABSURD LENGTHS WITH US TO TRY AND PROVE LEBANON WAS AN ADVANCED NATION AS FAR AS UNEMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS WERE CONCERNED. IN ANY EVENT, ALL LEADERS AGREED THIS PART OF THE CONFLICT WAS EASILY SETTLED ONCE, BUT NOT BEFORE, THE BASIC ISSUE-- THE STATUS OF THE PALESTINIANS -- HAD BEEN RESOLVED.

3. OUR IMPRESSION IS THAT ALL MARONITE LEADERS, WITH THE POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF SARKIS, AGREE THAT THERE CAN BE NO SETTLEMENT UNLESS THE PALESTINIANS ARE WILLING TO ABANDON THEIR PRESENT LEBANESE POLITICAL ROLE AND REVERT TO THE STATUS OF GUESTS IN LEBANON. THE CHRISTIANS WILL NOT ENDURE AGAIN ROAD BLOCKS AND OTHER FORMS OF HARASSMENT OF LEBANESE IN LEBANON BY THE PALESTINIANS, AS THEY HAVE SINCE 1969. THEY ALSO WISH TO PUT AN END TO A STATE OF PERIODIC POLITICAL AND MILITARY CRISES IN LEBANON. DORY CHAMOUN DEFINED THE CHRISTIAN OBJECTIVE AS "THE LIBERATION OF LEBANON" (FROM THE PALESTINIANS). IN PRACTICAL TERMS THIS MEANS THAT THE CHRISTIANS WILL ACCEPT THE CAIRO ACCORD BUT WITH MODIFICATIONS WHICH WOULD (A) LEAVE THE PALESTINIANS ONLY WITH LIGHT WEAPONS FOR CAMP SECURITY (THERE SEEMED SOME CONFUSION ON THIS POINT) AND (B) REQUIRE THOSE PALESTINIANS ARRIVING AFTER THE SIGNATURE OF THE CAIRO ACCORD IN 1969 TO LEAVE LEBANON. THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS WOULD ALSO INSIST ON A GUARANTEE BY ONE OR A GROUP OF NATIONS THAT THE CAIRO ACCORD WOULD BE APPLIED BY BOTH SIDES. THEY APPEAR OPEN TO SUGGESTIONS AS TO HOW THIS COULD BE DONE. WE ARE NOT QUITE SURE WHAT THE STATUS OF THE CAIRO ACCORD NEGOTIATIONS ARE.

4. HOW MUCH FLEXIBILITY THERE IS IN THE MARONITE POSITION IS HARD TO DETERMINE. OBVIOUSLY, THE MARONITES ARE NOT GIVING US THEIR FINAL POSITION. AFTER TALKING WITH CHAMOUN AND FRANGIE ONE HAD THE IMPRESSION THERE WAS VERY LITTLE GIVE IN THEIR POSITIONS. GEMAYAL AND SARKIS TALKED
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A SOFTER LINE AND SPOKE OF THE URGENCY OF ENDING THE CONFLICT, WHILE THE OTHERS EXPRESSED WILLING READINESS TO CONTINUE. OBVIOUSLY, MILITARY SUCCESSES HAVE EMBOLDENED THEM TO PRESS THEIR OBJECTIVES TOWARD THE PALESTINIANS. IN POINT OF FACT, IF ONE TAKES THE PREMISE THAT A PALESTINIAN STATE WITHIN A LEBANESE STATE IS UNACCEPTABLE, AND THE CHRISTIAN OBJECTIVE IS TO ELIMINATE PALESTINIAN DOMESTIC POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT, THEN THERE CAN'T BE MUCH

FLEXIBILITY IN THE CHRISTIAN POSITION, EXCEPT PERHAPS IN TACTICS.

5. ALL OF THEM SPEAK CONFIDENTLY OF THE STRENGTH OF THEIR PRESENT MILITARY POSITION BUT DIFFER SOMEWHAT AS TO THEIR CAPACITY TO SUSTAIN THAT POSITION FOR A LONG TIME. THIS DEPENDS IN LARGE PART ON THEIR ASSESSMENT OF SYRIA'S COMMITMENT TO LEBANON. AGAIN, FRANGIE AND CHAMOUN APPEAR RELATIVELY CONFIDENT THAT SYRIA WILL STICK WITH THEM UNTIL PEACE IS RESTORED ON CHRISTIAN TERMS. GEMAYEL AND SARKIS ARE MORE SKEPTICAL. WE ARE NOT SURE THAT THE SYRIANS ARE COMPLETELY AWARE OF THE FULL THRUST OF THE MARONITE POSITION.

6. THE MARONITE LEADERS ARE ALL WORRIED ABOUT IRAQI, LIBYAN, KUWAITI, SAUDI, AND GULF STATE SUPPORT OF THE PALESTINIANS. THE CHRISTIANS ARE OUTNUMBERED TO BEGIN WITH AND CONSEQUENTLY FEAR PALESTINIAN REINFORCEMENTS AND THE INFLUX OF MONEY WHICH PERMITS THE PALESTINIANS TO MAINTAIN THE STRUGGLE. THERE IS ALSO CONCERN THAT EGYPT WILL CONTINUE TO BACK THE PALESTINIANS AND ATTACK THE SYRIANS IN THE POLITICAL ARENA. WE ALSO FOUND THAT THE MARONITES GENUINELY BELIEVE THE SOVIETS ARE FULLY BACKING THE PALESTINIANS AND THE LEFTISTS. ALL OF THESE CONSIDERATIONS MIGHT TEND TO MAKE THE CHRISTIANS MORE FLEXIBLE, BUT IN PRACTICE IT SEEMS TO HAVE THE OPPOSITE EFFECT.

7. REGARDING PARTITION, THE BASIC MARONITE VIEW EXPRESSED TO US IS THAT PARTITION IS ONLY A FALLBACK POSITION IF THEY ARE UNABLE TO ACHIEVE AN END TO PALESTINIAN INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANESE POLITICS. MODERATES LIKE SARKIS ARE COMMITTED TO THE IDEA OF A UNIFIED

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LEBANON AND ARE UNCOMFORTABLE WITH THE IMAGE OF A MODERN CRUSADER STATE IN A MOSLEM SEA. PIERRE GEMAYEL, WHOSE FORCES BEAR THE TASK OF TRYING TO DEFEND CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES ISOLATED IN THE SOUTH, IS INTENSELY AWARE OF HOW IMPRACTICAL PARTITION WOULD BE FOR THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE. THE HAWKISH LEADERS, SUCH AS FRANGIE AND CHAMOUN, SEEM CONFIDENT OF THEIR ABILITY TO REUNIFY LEBANON ON THEIR WON TERMS AND ARE PREPARED TO CONTINUE THE PRESENT DE FACTO PARTITION OF LEBANON IF THAT IS NECESSARY. IN SUM, WE DO NOT SENSE THAT PARTITION IS A POLICY OBJECTIVE OF ANY OF THE MARONITE LEADERS, BUT WE DO SENSE THAT SOME ENVISAGE THE PROSPECT OF PARTITION WITH MORE EQUANIMITY THAN OTHERS.

8. OUR INFLUENCE ON THE MARONITES WILL VARY, OF COURSE,

IN DIRECT PROPORTION TO WHAT THEY THINK WE ARE DOING FOR THEM. WHAT THEY WOULD LIKE, ACCORDING TO OUR CONVERSATIONS, IS (A) A REPRESENTATIVE STATIONED IN JUNIEH TO MAINTAIN CONTACT, (B) DIPLOMATIC PRESSURE ON THOSE STATES AIDING THE PALESTINIANS, (C) SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT OF SYRIAN INTERVENTION, AND (D) ANY OTHER ACTION DESIGNED TO STOP THE FIGHTING AND ESTABLISH PEACE.

9. WE HAVE NOT DEPICTED CHRISTIAN PROJECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE. EXCEPT FOR DORY CHAMOUN'S SPECULATION AND PRESIDENT FRANGIE'S REFERENCE TO A CONSORTIUM FOR POSTWAR CONSTRUCTION, ALL HAVE CONCENTRATED QUITE NATURALLY ON THE CURRENT PROBLEMS. DORY TALKED OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT BEYOND BYBLOS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MODERN STATE WITHOUT DEFINING HIS TERMS. IT IS OUR IMPRESSION THAT ENERGIES ARE BEING SPENT ON THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE HAS BEEN CONSIDERED ONLY IN GENERAL TERMS. THE ONLY EXCEPTION TO THIS IS SARKIS, WHO HAVING FOUAD BOUTROS AND MICHEL KHOURY WRITE STRATEGY PAPERS IN ANTICIPATION OF HIS ASSUMPTION OF OFFICE.

10. SEPTTEL FOLLOWS LISTING QUESTIONS RAISED BY LEBANESE AND FOR WHICH WE MUST HAVE ANSWERS.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CHRISTIANS, POLICIES, COMMUNITY RELATIONS, PALESTINIANS, POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, CAT-B, INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS, POLITICAL LEADERS, PARTITION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 26 AUG 1976
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ElyME
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976STATE212206
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: MAR
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: n/a
Film Number: N760006-0480
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 2
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760816/aaaaaner.tel
Line Count: 201
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ORIGIN NODS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Reference: 76 NICOSIA 2491
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ElyME
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <21 APR 2004 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <13 OCT 2004 by ElyME>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: LOCK1
Status: <DBA CHANGED> MCM 20040603
Subject: THE POSITION OF THE CHRISTIANS VIS-A-VIS A SETTLEMENT OF THE LEBANESE CONFLICT
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, LE, MARONITES
To: BEIRUT
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006